MARVEL

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BALÁM
D'AMICO
MILLA

NEW MUTANTS
LETHAL LEGION

Idez '23
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The Chavetz Center, New York. Site of the Future Expo.

"You deserve to have people in your life who *support you.*"

I thought that could be me-- but I got carried away. Like I *always* do.

As if the solution to *any problem* is a *grand adventure.*

I only wish that were true. Sometimes the only way to heal is... to *heal.*

It's slow and annoying and hurts like hell.

"But maybe there's no shortcut.

"Wait. Those security guards? I recognize them. One of them got thrown into a *dinosaur topiary* next to me."

I'm going to go down there and do more recon.

Okay. Be careful, Shela.

You know me!

...Yeah. I think I *do.*

There you are! Found you.

HOWWIIIIIIIII...

Easy, Beatrice. It's me, Wolfsbane. ***Remember?*** I'm your friend.

This is Dani. She's good people.

I'm sorry Count Nefaria killed your friend.

Groannnnnn.

Wherever we go, people hate that guy.

You're a beauty! You should come live on Krakoa, we'll feed you fishes and seaweed and give you a flower crown and a cave full of treasures.

We're so ***outgunned...*** A giant sewer dragon could help even the odds.

Sigh. Morgan's right. We can't force her to go through that.

Hey! Hey! I think I have an idea.

You didn't see how ***scared*** she was when she heard Nefaria's voice.

It's ***not fair*** to make her face him again.

SPORTS OF THE FUTURE

I'm in. I managed to swap with someone who had a pass.

Great work. Your power is so useful.

I don't know, Martha... *possessing* people is way better than *taking their place.*

You can wreak havoc from a *safe distance.*

You get to always stay *yourself.*

Sometimes I wouldn't mind being *someone else.*

I can't be like you, taking all my *bad feelings* and using them to fuel some righteous *campaign* with a smile on my face.

God, I was so *full of crap.*

I was way more freaked out than I realized after *Sublime* got me.

I didn't even see how *messed up* I was until I almost *killed* Moonstone.

Maybe I didn't think I had the right to be traumatized, when you had been through so *much worse.*

It's not a contest.

I know.

TOILET OF THE FUTURE

It sucks. Instead of *you* taking care of *me,* we could have been taking care of *each other.*

Wait a sec.

ENERGY SOURCE OF THE FUTURE

I found *Nefaria.*

This machine is a limitless source of *raw power!*

Come close, one and all! Witness for yourselves!

Yeah, so I've hooked up with two out of three Hawkeyes.

I didn't ask.

You look like you could fit into a Hawkeye costume. Just sayin'.

Uh... what now?

POWER LEVEL

This is bad. He's almost ready. And we're *not.*

[00_Destiny]
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NEW MUTANTS

LETHAL LEGION

PART FIVE

Fresh recruit Shela Sexton, A.K.A. Escapade, has already helped defeat Sublime and his U-Men AND prevented her best friend Morgan Red's death. But the adventure took its toll on all of them. To shake it off, Escapade, Cerebella, and Scout devised a plan to rob the notorious Count Nefaria! But Shela left Morgan behind, and he ended up on an adventure of his own with Wolfsbane in the Morlock tunnels, where they nabbed some Spider-Slayer tech and befriended a beastie dubbed "Beatrice."

Meanwhile, the burglaring crew ran into trouble when they found the "Weird Engine" in Nefaria's vault! An ultimate weapon wielded by the Eternals, the Engine will turn thousands of Future Expo attendees in NYC into ionic batteries to restore Nefaria's full powers.

Tracking the kids, Dani, Karma, Galura, and Rahne swept in for a rescue, but Nefaria got away with the Engine. So, yeah. The future looks pretty grim.

[SHELA SEXTON, A.K.A. ESCAPADE]

[MORGAN RED]

[MARTHA JOHANSSON, A.K.A. CEREBELLA]

[GABBY KINNEY, A.K.A. SCOUT]

[RAHNE SINCLAIR, A.K.A. WOLFSBANE]

[DANI MOONSTAR, A.K.A. MIRAGE]

[XUÂN CAO MANH, A.K.A. KARMA]

[GABRIELLE DIWA, A.K.A. GALURA]

"VAMPIRE HEIST II"

5

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The sewers underneath the Chavetz Center.

Purrrrrrrrrrrrr.

We're *out of time.* Nefaria's about ready to turn on his machine.

The Weird Engine will cook *everything* within a half-mile radius.

And it will destroy Nefaria himself. He was *warned.* I saw inside his mind.

The only good thing about today is that I got to be part of this amazing crew for a minute.

But they're better off without all my bad ideas.

We don't need any more impractical capers.

The *grown-ups* are here now.

What do we do now? We already fought smart! We lurked in the darkness and set traps! And we *still lost.*

I don't really love *fighting.*

Me neither.

Time to get serious.

We're not going to fight them again.

We're *not?*

We're going to do a *heist.*

Wait, *what?!*

GOOD OLD-FASHIONED HEIST-PLANNING CONFAB!

DANI: So the situation is this: Count Nefaria has put the Weird Engine into a machine, and he's going to use it to turn everyone in the Chavetz Center into ionic batteries to recharge his powers. We've been unable to summon any help. There's a good chance this "ionic catalyzer" will turn midtown Manhattan into a crater. And Nefaria has people watching all the main entrances to the building.

MORGAN: I think I can put the machine out of action if I can get close enough.

KARMA: Trouble is, the Weird Engine is so unstable, if you look at it the wrong way, it'll detonate. So we can't risk causing a big disturbance.

WOLFSBANE: And the exhibit hall is full of civilians. We can't let them get hurt.

SCOUT: That's where Beatrice the dragon can help!

DANI: How?

SCOUT: Beatrice can herd the civilians to safety. Like a sheepdog!

WOLFSBANE: Could you do that, Beatrice? If I help you?

BEATRICE THE DRAGON: Grrrrrrrpurrrr!

WOLFSBANE: I think that's a yes.

SCOUT: It'll be easy. Just run in, chase everyone out, and then get away.

CEREBELLA: Hopefully that's the civilians taken care of. But how do we get Morgan to the machine without Nefaria noticing?

ESCAPADE: And without starting a big hootenanny with the Lethal Legion. A donnybrook? Hang on, I'm pulling up the thesaurus app on my phone. Ooh. A ruction!

GALURA: I have an idea. Morgan, how would you feel about being a super villain?

MORGAN: I mean...been there, done that. But okay?

WOLFSBANE: What about Moonstone? She can wipe the floor with all of us.

DANI: Leave Moonstone to me. So listen, the plan starts with Karma becoming a billionaire once again...

—

And so...

SECURITY

Excuse me. I am Xuân Cao Manh, C.E.O. of Hatchi Corporation.

You look so hot right now.

Shhh. Don't make me blush.

Uhh... Go on in, I guess.

We were told there were investment opportunities. I trust we will not be ***disappointed.***

The Chavetz Center basement.

I'm starting to realize how badly I ***messed up*** with Martha. I wish I'd opened up to her instead of trying to ***show off.***

I scored us some janitor uniforms.

Good work, Escapade.

ONLY

Explain again why we don't get to be fancy ***business people?***

They've got ***their job,*** you've got yours.

It's almost time. Don't worry, beastie.

Just a little jaunt, there and back again.

Purrrrrrrrrrrr...

The Hatchi Corporation is prepared to offer seed capital...

Ready, Scout?

Let's bring the darkness.

ELECTRIC PLANT

Hey. You can't be down here.

I'm sorry. I was looking for the vegan corn dogs.

They're so famous. I came halfway around the world to try them.

I loooove your outfit, have you done any modeling?

I--you-- lady, you gotta go back the other way!

--Possible Series C funding. If you can produce enough units.

ROBOT

ENABLER

YOUR FRIENDS JUST DON'T GET IT

Oh sure, oh sure.

I think it's great that robots can kill slowly instead of quickly now.

You *understand!*

This'll do juuuust fine.

YOU'RE JUST BLOWING OFF STEAM IT'S FINE

Maybe when this is over, I'll stay here. In New York.

See if I can get Morgan to ***start over*** with me.

Just like that? You're ***giving up*** on...on Krakoa?

Hang on. It's showtime.

I gotta hit the head. Be right back.

Yeah. Whatever.

I'll be right back too. Got something that needs handling.

Been *waiting* for this reunion.

+Gasp!+

Captain Marvel!

Wow, her hair's even blonder in real life!

There you go. Let's just get you somewhere priv--

Fish knuckles. It's Volga Belle!

Kill??!?

I'll make you wish you *never came back--*

Relax. Captain Marvel's not here. I just want to *talk,* Moonstone.

TOILET OF THE FUTURE

GRAVY SNAKES

I've got this, Scout. Go help Wolfsbane.

This heist is actually *organized!* Huh.

What could *we* possibly have to talk about?

You're a therapist. What's your read on Nefaria?

I always wind up working for *paranoid narcissists.* I've made peace with it.

How do you like me *now?*

Kill?!?!

GRAVY SNAKES

You're a murderer, but you're not a *mass* murderer. Nefaria's going to kill everyone here. You don't *come back* from that.

You'll forgive me if I'm not feeling *merciful,* since one of your people almost killed *me.*

We'd rather not do that again.

This isn't going to work. The Unicorn is *twice my size.*

Everybody pads their costumes these days. We'll make it fit.

Nobody will be looking at you, trust me.

Sigh I do trust you. Even though you suck sometimes.

Lights out.

KLIK

You were *stalling* me!

I meant what I *said.* Don't--

Who *interferes?!?!*

POWER LEVEL

Pay me no mind. Just doing my Unicorny thing.

MEEP!

People! If you want to *live* to see the future, *get out of here!*

ROOOAAAAARR!

EXIT

Almost got it...
Creature, I will have your *head!* I will--*eh?*
You! What are you doing?
We got *played,* boss.
You *again!* What have you *done?*
I *know.* I look pretty great, right?
Almost got him...
ROOARR!
This way! Let's get Beatrice to *safety!*
You're not the *Unicorn!*
So much--
This is *perfect.* I can hit you as many times as I *want.*
--for avoiding a fight.
You! *Impostor!* Away from my machine!
Aaack!
No!
Nefaria, stop! We told you it *won't work--*
Too late!
Eeeeeeee!
You came here seeking miracles!
And now you are *become* miracles. You will all be my *ionic batteries!*
Yaaaagh!

I almost landed on top of you. I'm glad I changed back in time.

This is a disaster.

KKZOOOOOZZZZKKK

RADIATION SHIELDING OF THE FUTURE

Growwwwllll...

What's wrong? Wolfsbane? Beatrice?

We need to stay inside this energy dome, or we're *cooked!*

You are lost either way!

It's all gone *wrong.* We only made things *worse.*

And now it's *too late.*

I just connected with Dani. She and Karma are *trapped.*

Everyone else is *dying* up there.

It's *not* too late.

Listen, you're the most *confusing person* I know. So go confuse Nefaria!

Just don't get drunk this time.

I know I swore you wouldn't have to face Nefaria *again*, Beatrice, but my friends are in trouble.

We won't let *anyone* hurt you.

Do you trust us?

Gnarrrrrr...

We can't get past that energy barrier!

We can't. But you can. Do your do-si-do thing.

You *see*? My *power* is restored!

Wha...?

I will still be *beautiful* when you are all dust!

Ahhh, not *again*.

Sorry. But yeah.

Count, you don't have to hurt all these people. You'd make a great motivational speaker! I heard there's good money.

There you are.

Not giving you the *chance* to try and *kill* me again--

Can't think, no time, what do I do???

I didn't mean--

--to hurt you.

No excuses. You die--

What?!

More disloyalty? See how I recompense those who *betray* me!

Oh crap.

I don't *need* you anymore, Moonstone. I don't need *anyone.*

The *future* belongs to *me.*

ZAAAAPP

Aaaaaaah, it sears my skin, why does it--?

Those scientists tried to warn you. You can't absorb all that ionic power.

Your body is too damaged. You're going to explode!

How big a bang are we talking?

Midtown is toast.

Oh, it hurts, why does it hurt so much?

I could take his place again, but then... I don't know.

Everybody stand back. Help is coming.

THOOM

GRAAAAOOOO!

You did good, girl!

Now let's get him far away from here.

Grrrr.

Hnnngh...

Go go go!

Forever young...ughhh... my will...

We have to head south! Away from the city.

FLIP

Beatrice, no!

What?!?!

BOOM

Beatrice! You didn't have to--

She took the blast for us.

We promised. We *promised* she'd be okay. I...

You were so beautiful.

Raaaahhh!!!

Beatrice! You're okay!

You gave me such a fright.

SHELA
Hey, so that wasn't the worst convention we've been to, right?

MORGAN
That's fair. Remember the so-called immersive Negative Zone experience?!

SHELA
It was a shed! A shed full of silly string and migraine lights! It smelled like cat barf.

Anyway, we did good. Nobody died. Except maybe Nefaria? We never found a body, but I hope he's really gone.

MORGAN
When I was lying on the floor I noticed his pants were unevenly hemmed. It drove me nuts.

SHELA
I'm sorry I ghosted you. That was a terrible thing to do.

MORGAN
I forgive you.

I thought it would always be you and me against the world. But that's a siege mentality, the same as hiding away on an island. And I like our new friends.

SHELA
Listen, you'll always be my family. No matter what.

I still remember when I thought being trans AND a mutant meant my life was over. Like the whole world would be wrapped in poison barbed wire.

You're why I'm here now.

MORGAN
Same, so much same. You and I found ourselves together. That's everything.

Lately I keep thinking about what it means to be part of a community. Or a team. And I think it's like any other relationship. It's gotta be reciprocal, or else it's abusive.

SHELA
Krakoa needs a trans hangout!

MORGAN
Maybe I can help make that happen.

SHELA
Are you finally coming? For a visit?
Please please please

MORGAN
Maybe... We'll see? Okay, yeah. Rahne wore me down.

SHELA
I'll see you there!!!

Krakoa.

Never seen Beatrice look so ***happy.***

You really love to take in ***strays,*** don't you?

Somebody has to take care of all the lost creatures.

I suppose it is pretty nice here.

It really, really ***is.***

Stay as long as you like, Morgan. Leave whenever you want.

So, um...

Yeah.

Why am I so ***nervous?***

So, well, at least we didn't have to wrap bacon around anything.

Yeah. Bacon. It's not a ribbon, people.

Why was it easier to talk when everything was on fire?

Umm... so...

Count Nefaria told me I should cut you out of my life.

But...I like you. Maybe *too much.* Enough to, apparently, get me into major trouble.

The thing you said *before.* The only way to heal is to heal.

I want to help you do that. I want us to help *each other* feel safe.

I'm still learning how to be there for people.

Well... Krakoa is all about *second chances,* right?

I'm just sad we never got to *dance.*

I guess we can't do that unless we're checking for guards and stuff.

...Who says?

It's happening. We're *dancing!* At last.

We're both *leading* and both *following.* It's chaotic?

But I *like it.*

So you can turn *anything* into chocolate?

As long as it's *organic,* yeah.

Moldy cheese!!! Do the cheese next!

Jonathan *pooped.* Make it *chocolate.*

Okay, okay.

This is the *best.*

I noticed back at the Chavetz Center, you kept giving Cerebella and Escapade missions alone together. Scouting, janitoring.

I couldn't resist.

I've never slow-danced before.

Me neither.

We probably look ridiculous.

I'll take it.

Chocolate scat!

Hey, Morgan... care to dance?

Umm... sure.

Uh, just so you know, I'm ***asexual.***

Heh, I'm a little old for you anyway. I'm just happy to have you as a ***friend.***

Same.

Next time, I'm picking the activity though.

And ***I*** get to pick what we do on ***our*** next date.

Date? Does that mean--Are we--?

Can I kiss you?

Yes!!!

My heart is louder than the music right now.

Oh wow. Oh wow.

Oh ***WOW.***

THE END.

Writing Escapade (and Morgan and Hibbert!) has been one of the coolest experiences of my life. When I first started talking to Marvel about creating a trans hero back in the summer of 2017, I had no idea how much this character would end up meaning to me.

Escapade is a tribute to all the heroes I grew up loving, but she's also my attempt at creating a hero who speaks to the terrible moment we're living through right now, where so many of us are seeing our identities banned, contested, and toxified. I tried to fill Escapade with contradictions: She's naive but cynical, joyfully angry, and eager to belong but suspicious of any group that tries to claim her as their own. Shela Sexton's parents threw her away for being trans, and now she doesn't know how to be part of a family.

My hope is that if you start with MARVEL VOICES PRIDE (2022) #1 and then read NEW MUTANTS #31-33 and this miniseries, you'll get one story in nine parts about a young woman learning how to be better to the people in her life.

I'm inexpressibly grateful to editor Sarah Brunstad for giving me this opportunity and being so patient with my steep learning curve in comics. Sarah is the best cat-herding beekeeper you will ever meet. Also, thanks to Anita Okoye for coming up with the name Escapade and offering so many brilliant suggestions. Artists Ted Brandt and Ro Stein gave Shela and Morgan their wonderfully distinctive looks and a lot of their personalities. Also, thanks to X-editor Jordan D. White, plus Tamra Bonvillain, Alberto Alburquerque, Enid Balám, Elisabetta D'Amico, Javi Fernández, Matt Milla, and too many others to name. Y'all rock. I'm seriously going to miss receiving emails with gorgeous art of flying turtles and sewer dragons.

Escapade belongs to the Marvel Universe now. I hope you'll be seeing her around, and maybe I'll get to write her again someday. But no matter what, I'm glad these nine issues will always be out there, and I'm so thankful that I got to tell a story about someone who dreamed of growing up to be a super villain until she grew up and found better dreams.

Charlie Jane Anders,
June 2023